REMARKS

Reconsideration and allowance of the subject application are respectfully solicited.

Claims 1, 3, and 5 through 16 are pending, with Claims 1, 5, 7, 12, and 16 being independent. Claims 2, 4, and 17 through 19 have been cancelled without prejudice. Claims 1, 5, 6, 7, 8, and 11 have been amended.

REQUEST FOR WITHDRAWAL OF FINALITY

Applicant respectfully requests withdrawal of the finality of the Official Action on the grounds that the Official Action has not explained why the rejection of previously-objected-to Claims 9 and 14 (which were indicated as being allowable if rewritten in independent form) was necessitated by Applicant's amendment of those claims. MPEP 706.07(a).

RESPONSE TO OFFICIAL ACTION

Claims 1 through 19 were variously rejected under 35 U.S.C. §§ 102 and 103 over U.S. Patent Nos. 5,758,210 (Hamada, et al.), 5,905,919 (Ide), and 5,361,095 (Toshinobu, et al.). All rejections are respectfully traversed.

Claim 1 recites, inter alia, a reading processing circuit for performing an operation of (a) applying signal reading processing to the plurality of cell units in response to the monitoring result (monitoring a P-B signal from a first set of the plurality of cell units in the sensor block, after the accumulation operation controlled by the control circuit is finished) obtained by the characteristic determination circuit being a predetermined result, and (b) disabling signal reading processing for the plurality of cell units in response to the monitoring

result obtained by the characteristic determination circuit being another predetermined result, which is different from the predetermined result, wherein every time the operation for accumulating image signal components in a sensor block is finished, the monitoring a P-B signal by the characteristic determination circuit and the operation executed by the reading processing circuit are performed.

Claim 5 recites, inter alia, a reading control circuit for executing, during the reading operation, a monitoring processing operation for monitoring the P-B signal of the image signal in a sensor block to which the reading operation is applied, and for selectively executing a reading processing operation for reading the image signal from the sensor block whose P-B signal was subject to the monitoring processing operation, after the monitoring processing operation, in combination with a determination circuit for evaluating the P-B signal read in the monitoring processing operation and for determining whether or not the reading processing operation is to be executed by the reading control circuit.

Claim 7 recites, inter alia, a reading control circuit for comparing the level of the P-B signal read by the monitoring circuit for a focus or distance detection area with a determination level determined in advance, for controlling the signal reading circuit to read the image signal in that same focus or distance detection area in response to the level of the P-B signal having a first relationship with the determination level, and for disabling reading of the image signal by the signal reading circuit in that same focus or distance detection area in response to the level of the P-B signal having a second relationship with the determination level different from the first relationship.

Claim 12 recites, inter alia, calculating focus or distance detection information according to the read image signal, with a reading control circuit for reading the difference output

for a focus or distance detection area from the difference output section through the signal reading section, for reading the image signal output from the image-signal output section through the signal reading section in that same focus or distance detection area in response to the difference being greater than a predetermined value, and for disabling reading of the image signal in that same focus or distance detection area in response to the difference being smaller than the predetermined value, wherein the plurality of image-signal accumulation sensor blocks respectively correspond to a plurality of focus or distance detection areas.

Claim 16 recites, inter alia, calculating focus or distance detection information according to the read image signal, with a reading control circuit for reading the maximum value and the minimum value of the image signal for a focus or distance detection area through the signal reading section, for calculating the difference therebetween, for reading the image signal through the signal reading section in that same focus or distance detection area in response to the difference being greater than a predetermined value, and for disabling reading of the image signal in that same focus or distance detection area in response to the difference being smaller than the predetermined value, wherein the plurality of image-signal accumulation sensor blocks respectively correspond to a plurality of focus or distance detection areas.

However, Applicant respectfully submits that none of Hamada, et al., Ide, and Toshinobu, et al., even in combination, assuming, arguendo, that such could be combined, discloses or suggests at least the above-discussed combinations of claimed features as recited, inter alia, in Claims 1, 5, 7, 12, and 16. With further respect to Claims 12 and 16, the Official Action relies upon col. 1, lines 45 through 55, Fig. 9, items S1-S8, and col. 10, lines 33 through 47 of Ide; however, Applicant respectfully submits that neither the foregoing nor the remainder of Ide provides either a description or a suggestion of the above-discussed claimed features,

including the recitations of the combination of --same-- focus or distance detection area, with calculation of focus or distance detection information according to the read image signal. In addition, the assertions in the Official Action that the claimed features are inherently disclosed are respectfully traversed as being without support. It is further respectfully submitted that there has been no showing of any indication of motivation in the cited documents that would lead one having ordinary skill in the art to arrive at the above-discussed claimed features.

The dependent claims are also submitted to be patentable because they set forth additional aspects of the present invention and are dependent from independent claims discussed above. Therefore, separate and individual consideration of each dependent claim is respectfully requested.

This Amendment After Final Rejection is an earnest attempt to advance prosecution and reduce the number of issues, and is believed to clearly place this application in condition for allowance. Furthermore, Applicant respectfully submits that a full appreciation of these amendments will not require undue time or effort given the Examiner's familiarity with this application. Moreover, this Amendment was not earlier presented because Applicant earnestly believed that the prior Amendment placed the subject application in condition for allowance. Accordingly, entry of this Amendment under 37 C.F.R. § 1.116 is respectfully requested.

Applicant submits that this application is in condition for allowance, and a Notice of Allowance is respectfully requested.

Applicant's undersigned attorney may be reached in our Washington, D.C. office by telephone at (202) 530-1010. All correspondence should continue to be directed to our address listed below.

Respectfully submitted,

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